



# Cherokee National Forest

## OUTDOOR SAFETY TIPS

### Fall—Winter



Here are a few safety tips that may help you have a safer and more enjoyable outdoor experience.

Each year approximately 3 million people visit the 650,000 acre Cherokee National Forest. This area offers a variety of recreation opportunities from hiking, hunting and camping to fishing, picnicking and mountain biking.

To ensure that your visit to the great outdoors is enjoyable and memorable always put safety first! Before you participate in any outdoor activity think about the basic rules of safety that apply—especially during fall and winter.

#### Remember:

- *National forests are remote and rugged.*
- *The environment in a national forest is much different than in urban areas.*
- *Planning your visit ahead of time may help make your visit more enjoyable and safer.*
- *Let someone at home know what your outing plans are.*
- *There are various types of hunting seasons going on in the Cherokee National Forest approximately eight months out of the year.*

**Flash Flooding**—A flash flood is a serious weather event for forest visitors because rising flood water is extremely dangerous—a sudden surge can claim victims in less than one minute.

There may be very little time to react. Forest visitors need to be conscious about sudden storms. Families should discuss how they would alert each other and climb to safety if rushing water arrives.

⇒ Weather experts say the best defence is to be weather-ready before a storm hits.

- ⇒ When a NOAA flash flood warning is issued for your area, or the moment you realize that water is rising around you, act quickly!
- ⇒ You might only have seconds to save your life.
- ⇒ Climb to higher ground. Do not get into a vehicle.
- ⇒ Monitor weather forecasts prior to and during your visit!

**Bear Aware**—Keep in mind that black bears make their home in the Forest. Bears are opportunists by nature and will feed on whatever is readily available. To reduce the chances of a bear encounter follow these simple rules:

- **NEVER** feed bears;
- Do not leave food out unattended;
- Properly dispose of trash;
- Do not cook or store food in or near your tent or sleeping area;
- Keep a clean campsite;
- **NEVER** approach a bear;
- Keep children & pets close at hand;
- If a black bear approaches you, frighten it by yelling, wave your arms—try to look big, bang pans, or throw sticks or rocks;
- If the bear is persistent, move away slowly to a secure area— never run. If in a group, stay together;
- **DO** respect bears and admire them from a distance.

**REMEMBER: Animals in the Forest are wild. Exhibit caution when near wildlife—keep your distance!**





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**Lightning**—Lightning can be very dangerous. When lightning is possible in your area, there are two key alerts to watch for: A **severe thunderstorm watch** is issued when conditions are conducive to the development of severe thunderstorms. A **severe thunderstorm warning** is issued when a severe thunderstorm has actually been observed by spotters or indicated on radar, and is occurring or imminent in the warning area. Safety Checklist ([download](#)).

**Lost** —If you become lost don't panic - stay calm! Try and remember how you got to your present location. Look for landmarks such as trails, streams, high points etc. Try to find a high point with a good view and plan your route from there. Many trees will be devoid of leaves during late fall and winter, providing a good view of the area. If you find a trail or road stay on it.



Sometimes it may be wise to stay where you are and wait for help to find you. If you stay put it may help if you wait in the open where you are clearly visible. To help draw attention use three shouts, three blasts on a whistle, three flashes of a light, three of anything is an international distress signal. If you decide to proceed go slowly. Take your time and gather *your wits*.

### Winter Weather Hazards

**TRAVEL:** From snow showers to freezing rain and sleet, the weather impact that winter storms bring can be both beautiful and deadly. Winter storms also can be deceiving. Even a small amount of precipitation can cause problems, especially in areas where snow is an unusual occurrence. Many fatalities from car accidents occur as a result of slippery roads. Downed trees and power outages can also be caused by ice storms or by heavy wet snow. Safety Checklist ([download](#))



**HYPOTHERMIA:** When exposed to cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced. Prolonged exposure to cold will eventually use up your body's stored energy. The result is hypothermia, or abnormally low body temperature.

Body temperature that is too low affects the brain, making the victim unable to think clearly or move well. This makes hypothermia particularly dangerous since a person may not know it is happening and won't be able to do anything about it.

Hypothermia is most likely at very cold temperatures, but it can occur even at cool temperatures (above 40° F) if a person becomes chilled from rain, sweat, or submersion in cold water. Safety Checklist ([download](#))







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**Waterfalls** — Although waterfalls and bodies of water are beautiful and soothing, caution should be used when near them!

Watch your step when traveling near streams or waterfalls – the footing is often slippery! Stay on established trails and **do not** venture out onto waterfalls.

Exhibit caution at all times. Step back and admire the beauty before you!

**Hunting**—Under an agreement with the Forest Service and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) the Forest is managed cooperatively as a Wildlife Management Area (North Cherokee WMA; South Cherokee WMA). The Forest Service is responsible for managing wildlife habitat and the TWRA sets game and fish seasons and bag limits.

Much of the Cherokee NF is open for hunting within legal seasons. Six bear reserves are found throughout the Forest and are closed to bear hunting. Areas such as recreation and administrative sites are closed to hunting. It is illegal to shoot any firearm across or from trails, roads or vehicles.

When hunting the national forest hunters are reminded to respect private land boundaries and be aware of the presence of non-hunting visitors. Be safe and always know your target.

There are approximately 1,500 miles of roads in the Forest. About one half of those are closed to vehicular traffic. Unless posted otherwise, closed (gated) roads are open to foot, bicycle and horse use.

National forest visitors should be aware that there are various types of hunting seasons going on in the Cherokee National Forest approximately nine months out of the year.



**Leave No Trace**—Leave No Trace is an outdoor land use ethic. Following Leave No Trace, helps you minimize your impacts on the outdoor environment and will help you to understand how your actions can impact the land and other users of the forest.

Following these 7 principles of Leave No Trace will help you have a more enjoyable trip:

- Plan ahead and prepare
- Travel and camp on durable surfaces
- Dispose of waste properly
- Leave what you find
- Minimize campfire impacts
- Respect wildfire
- Be considerate of other visitors



Above all, have an enjoyable and **SAFE** visit to your Cherokee National Forest!

**To learn more about outdoor safety visit online:**

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/r8/recreation/safety-ethics>

